DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 102 618 CS 500 986

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TITLE Oral History: An Annotated Bibliography.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Annotated Bibliographies; *History; Literature; Local History; *Oral Communication; Oral Expression
IDENTIFIERS Folklore; *Oral History

ABSTRACT

Constructed to introduce the newcomer to the variety and complexity of the problems of oral history, this selective, annotated bibliography includes: (1) basic articles or texts in related fields important in oral history field work, (2) works with extensive bibliographies, (3) works not covered in earlier and available bibliographies (except those significant in current debates), and (4) a few works based on oral history interviews. Entries are listed under four headings: general background, books, articles, and books using oral history. (JM)

ED102618

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ORAL HISTORY

An Annotated Bibliography

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The increasing popularity of oral history as a research aid and teaching device has resulted in an almost exponential rise in the quantity of the literature on oral history and related topics. Literally thousands of articles, books, notes and project descriptions have issued forth since the last compiled bibliography in 1971.

While the growth of this literature is to be welcomed because it shows an ever increasing self awareness on the part of historians and others, and indicates a concern to understand what it is that they are doing, it also makes it virtually impossible in this short space to do anything but indicate the range of concerns and to note examples of the latest thinking about the practice. Further, because the field is in such a state of flux, the literature on oral history has not yet begun to coalesce around a set of definitive works across disciplinary lines, which would point to new directions with the same certainty that exists in such related fields as folklore or linguistics. In short, the theoretical and methodological problems or oral history are still open to debate and widely varying theses and practices; it is a field still in its formative years.

For this reason, this short bibliography has been constructed to give the newcomer to the field some idea of the variety and complexity of the problems of oral history. It also includes a few basic articles or texts in related fields which are becoming increasingly important in oral history field work. Wherever possible we have selected works with extensive bibliographies which the reader is urged to consult for further investigation into these unfamiliar disciplines.

CS 500 986

As a method of selection we have also decided not to list works covered in earlier and generally available bibliographies unless those works are so siginificant to current debates that some mention of them must be made.

Finally we have included in this bibliography only a few of the hundreds of works recently published which are based upon oral history interviews. These particular works listed here have been selected because we feel that they raise many of significant issues and questions about the practice of oral history.

Since the field of oral history is in no sense rigidly defined, and since the interests of researchers and practitioners are varied and often contradictory, this bibliography has purposely been made as eclectic as possible. We hope that what we have sacrificed in focus is more than compensated for by the quality of the titles mentioned.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

For those seeking to familiarize themselves with the field the publications of the Oral History Association listed below should be consulted. Some of these publications are out of print but can be found in most large libraries. Most are available for purchase through the Oral History Association, Waterman Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont 05401.

Shumway, Gary. Oral History in the United States: A Directory. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

This 120 page directory lists and describes 230 various oral history projects and their access policies. It also notes roughly 100 planned projects as of 1970. While the growth of the field has already made the listing out of date, it remains the only compilation now available and gives some indication of the variety of work being done in oral history.

Shippers, Donald J. and Adelaide G. Tussler. A Bibliography on Oral History. Los Angeles: The Oral History Association, 1967.

A brief listing of 80 articles and 18 institutional publications, this bibliography is out of print. Most of its citations have been incorporated elsewhere.

Wasserman, Manfred J. Bibliography on Oral History. New York: The Oral History Association, 1971.

The most complete bibliography on oral history yet published, this 40 page booklet is a comprehensive list of titles up to 1970. It also contains representative examples of 20 books using oral history interviews. Selectively annotated and indexed by subject and author it remains the best guide to all but the most recent literature on oral history.

In addition, the Oral History Association also has on hand the transcribed proceedings of its yearly colloquia from 1967 to 1972. These Proceedings contain a hodgepodge of presentations, discussions, formal papers and minutes which cover every conceivable aspect of oral history from indexing and legal and ethical problems to relations with other disciplines. In addition, they contain a wealth of reports from practicing oral historians on their field work experiences and problems.

Since 1973 the Oral History Association has published an annual bulletin entitled, The Oral History Review in place of The Proceedings. The Review is more selective and focused but in general is a culling of the more significant colloquia presentations. The Association also publishes a quarterly Newsletter listing latest publications and containing review essays of work in the field. Back issues of the Newsletter are available to those interested.

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Several other finding aids are also available to interested students. The National Union Catalogue of Manuscript Collections now includes data on a number of the larger oral history projects and lists individual memoirs in its index. R.R. Bowker also plans to publish soon a massive listing of oral history collections. Entitled, Oral History Collections, and edited by Alan Meckler and Ruth McMullin, this volume will describe in some detail the subject holdings of a large number of collections both in the United States and several foreign countries. The Oral History Report of the Oral History Research Office of Columbia University which is published annually also provides a useful, convenient, and very often most informative guide to the field.

BOOKS

Banaka, William H. Training in Depth Interviewing. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Prepared for psychological and social service counsellors, and concerned with the distinction between therapeutic and informational interviewing this work contains much that is of use to oral history interviewers using open and unstructural interviewing techniques. The annotated bibliography is probably the most catholic and useful listing currently available.

Baum, Willa K. Oral History for the Local Historical Society. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 2nd Ed., 1974.

Revised and updated, this short volume remains the best introductory handbook and guide for field workers in oral history. In short sections the author covers each aspect of the interviewing process cogently and carefully. Prepared for beginners in the field it is also useful for those with wider experience. A short bibliography is appended.

Benjamin, Alfred. The Helping Interview. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

An interesting, if short, handbook on how to interview so as to engender an empathetic response, this book seems to improve with each reading. It also contains a useful discussion of pauses, ums, uh uhs etc. and their function in a conversation, and a brief bibliography.

Berry, Francis. The Physical Voice of Poetry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

An attempt to recreate the physical voices of a selected group of English poets from their poetry, this work should stimulate oral historians to more carefully examine problems of textual analysis and prosody and their relationship to oral testimony.

Curtiss, Richard, Gary Shumway and Shirley E. Stephenson. A Guide for Oral History Programs. Fullerton, California: California State University at Fullerton and the Southern California Historical Council, 1973.

This guide is designed primarily for beginners in the field and those who desire to use oral history as a teaching device. It contains instructions and samples on every step of the oral history process and summarizes a decade of experience in the field.

BOOKS (cont'd.)

Dexter, Lewis Anthony. Elite and Specialized Interviewing. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

While this useful handbook contains only one article directly dealing with oral history, Charles Morrissey's "On Oral History Interviewing," it does cover a range of issues not usually found in more limited works. The concept of "elite interviewing" should not be taken too literally since much of the material is applicable to non-elite interviewing as well.

Dorson, Richard M. American Folklore and the Historian. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

The classic work which attempts to integrate two very diverse fields, these essays should be read in conjunction with the author's discussion "The Oral Historian and the Folklorist," Selections from the Fifth and Sixth National Colloquia on Oral History. New York: The Oral History Association, 1972. Together these works represent the thinking of our leading folklorist on the relation of history in general and oral history in particular to folklore.

Finnegan, Ruth. Oral Literature in Africa. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970.

A superb discussion of oral literature and testimony which not only draws fine and useful distinctions between oral and written sources, but also develops a theoretical schema for understanding the various aspects of oral testimony. This book is must reading for those who would understand the relation of anthropological and historical field work.

Goldstein, Kenneth S. A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1964.

While nowhere directly concerned with the problems of historical interviewing, because we have no scholarly handbook for oral history, Goldstein's work in folklore remains a basic introduction to the problems and potentials of field work. The historian must, however, remain cognizant of the very real differences between folklore and history. The book also contains basic bibliography for the student of folklore.

BOOKS (cont'd.)

Gordon, George N. The Languages of Communication: A Logical and Psychological Examination. New York: Hastings House, 1969.

While much of the discussion in this work is foreign territory for historians, Gordon's book is a useful and handy introduction to a rapidly changing, but important, set of disciplines which should be made familiar to oral historians.

Grele, Ronald J. Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Methods and Problems of Oral History. New York: Precedent Press, 1975.

Essays by Dennis Tedlock and Grele, an interview with Studs Terkel and commentary by Alice Kessler Harris, Saul Benison and Jan Vansina comprise this volume. The book ranges from practical and ethical problems to complex theoretical formulations, and in the process summarizes much of the current debate over oral history and oral testimony. The second section, which is a general roundtable discussion by all six authors, is also available on cassette.

Mason, Elizabeth and Louis Starr. The Oral History Collection at Columbia University. New York: Oral History Research Office, 1973.

This latest edition of the catalog of the Columbia Oral History Research Office covers not only the memoirs in the Columbia collection but also those of other projects with which Columbia shares mutual deposit arrangements. It is thus the most comprehensive listing of available oral history memoirs in the country. Organized by subject and providing information on access, topics covered, length, and finding aids, it is a handy guide to a major portion of the work currently being done by oral historians.

Moss, William W. Oral History Program Manual. New York: Praeger, 1974.

This manual is a sound and scholarly handbook geared to those wishing to establish oral history programs. Closely tied to a conception of oral history as an adjunct to archival research and reflecting the author's long connection with the National Archives the program suggestions may be too ambitious in scope and financing for most projects, but many of Moss' guidelines are useful and well taken.

Norman, Donald A. (ed.) Memory and Attention: An Introduction to Human Information Processing. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968.

While the experimental nature of the studies selected by Norman make this a work of limited use to oral historians, it does give an insight into a recent scholarship and psychological theories on the nature and function of memory.

BOOKS (cont'd.)

Vansina, Jan. Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.

While currently under attack for its claims for oral testimony, Vansina's book remains the classic work on the analysis of oral testimony and oral tradition for historical purposes. It is also the most readable statement of the problems of historical field work and offers sound and careful guidelines for the interpretation of oral evidence.

Wilkie, James W. Elitelore, Latin American Studies, Volume 28. Los Angeles: Latin American Center UCLA, 1973.

Wilkie's little volume is an attempt to study three disparate problems; the study of a set of historic events, an analysis of the folklore or mythology of an upper class, and the construction of an interviewing questionnaire for oral historians. The events themselves--those surrounding the Mexican revolution have been more adequately studied elsewhere. The questionnaire is thoughtful and complex but of limited usefulness. Wilkie's discussion of the cognitive processes of his elite is, however, of major importance of our understanding of the problematic within which historical information is conveyed.

ARTICLES

Benison, Saul, "Oral History and Manuscript Collecting," Isis, Vol. 53 (March 1962), pp. 113-117.

An early presentation of the author's warning that oral testimony and oral histories are a unique type of record and cannot be used in the same manner as written sources, this essay also contains some very practical advice on the conduct and analysis of an oral history interview.

Benison, Saul, "Oral History: A Personal View," Modern Methods in the History of Medicine, edited by Edwin Clark. New York: Oxford University Press, (1971), pp. 287-296.

The most comprehensive statement of Benison's views on oral history as a first interpretation and joint creation by historian and respondent, this essay is a clear and concise call for the highest research standards possible in the conduct of an interview. While directed primarily to the professional historian Benison's strictures are applicable to beginners and nonprofessional practitioners as well.

Benison, Saul, "Reflections on Oral History," American Archivist, Vol. 28, No. 1, (January 1965), pp. 71-77.

This short but important essay by one of the most insightful historians working in the field of oral history discusses the relationship of oral history to the recent revolution in communications, the nature of an autobiographical narrative, oral tradition, nonelite interviewing, and oral history as a teaching tool. It is as provocative as it is comprehensive and is an excellent introduction to some of the deeper historiographical problems raised by oral history.

Colman, Gould, "Oral History: An Appeal for More Systematic Procedures," American Archivist, Vol. 28, No. 1, (January 1965), pp. 79-83.

This essay, part of a symposium on oral history, is a brief but excellent set of "rules" for the conduct of an interview which are offered as standards for the field at large.

Cutler, William W. III, "Accuracy in Oral Interviewing," Historical Methods Newsletter, No. 3, (June 1970), pp. 1-7.

Although based upon narrowly behavioral studies of memory this article is one of the few which have attempted to use current work in other disciplines to assess the accuracy and validity of memory, and to apply that work to the practice of oral history. The thrust of the article is generally bleak.

ARTICLES (cont'd)

Frisch, Michael, "Oral History and Hard Times: A Review Essay, "Red Buffalo, Numbers 2 and 3, n.d.

By far the best review of Hard Times which takes seriously Terkel's distinction between history and memory and tries to come to grips with just what it is that makes oral history an important historiographical practice. The difficulty of obtaining copies of this fleeting journal is unfortunate as Frisch's essay deserves wide reading.

Gilb, Corrine Lathrop, "Tape Recorded Interviewing: Some Thoughts from California, "American Archivist, Vol. 20, Number 4, (October 1957), pp. 335-344.

More than just a report from the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California at Berkeley or just another how to do it guide, Gilb's essay is an early and insightful discussion of many of what are now the major concerns of the field.

Goodwyn, Lawrence, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights," American Historical Review, Vol. 76, Number 4, (December 1971), pp. 1435-56.

A major attempt to create a bi-racial history of the American South by combining oral history and the case study method this essay, the first of a series, contains all the positive and negative aspects of such an approach. It is precise, elegant and pointed in its treatment of disenfranchisement but lacks the larger cultural context which one hopes oral history interviews should provide. It is, however, a welcome relief from the often shoddy documentary uses to which oral history has been put and is also a significant contribution to the literature on Populism.

Hoffman, Alice, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History," Today's Speech, Volume 22, Number 1, (Winter 1974), pp. 23-27.

A careful discussion of the limits of both written and oral records. Hoffman shows where and how each complements and corrects the other.

Hoyle, Norman, "Oral History," Library Trends (July 1972), pp. 60-81.

A well developed discussion of the literature on oral history and the problems of the practice which raises crucial questions about just what it is that oral history can and cannot do. Written primarily for librarians and archivists, Hoyle also addresses himself to basic historiographical conflicts and tensions.

ARTICLES (cont'd)

Lynd, Staughton, "Guerrilla History in Gary," Liberation, Vol. 14, (October 1969), pp. 17-20.

An early statement of the author's use of oral history to evoke or promote a revolutionary consciousness, this essay raises significant issues about the use of history in general and oral history in particular to stimulate social activism.

Kelly, Alfred H. "Constitutional Liberty and the Law of Libel," American Historical Review, Col. 74, (December 1968), pp. 429-52.

At a time when the whole question of libel and copyright in the field of recorded sound is so widely debated and open to legal revision, it would be foolish to recommend any of the current literature. Kelly's article is, however, a useful starting point for those concerned with libel and the research surrounding the legal question of libel.

Maccoby, Eleanor E. and Nathan Maccoby, "The Interview: A Tool of Social Science," Handbook of Social Psychology edited by Gardner Lindzey. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Publishing Co., Vol. 1, pp. 449-487.

This comprehensive summary of the methods of interviewing and the early literature on interviewing drawn from many fields in the social sciences is a handy, albeit scholarly overview of the field. Out of print, but still available, because it is not so tied to the narrow theoretical conventions of the behavioralist approach it is a far better and more useful survey than the essay by Charles F. Connell and Robert L. Kahn in the second and revised edition of the Handbook (Volume 2, pp. 526-595). The Connell-Kahn bibliography is, however, more complete and up to date.

Morrissey, Charles T., "Truman and the Presidency - Records and Oral Recollections," American Archivist, Volume 28, Number 1, (January 1965), pp. 53-61.

An excellent discussion of the relationship of oral history and manuscript or written records, this article is also a healthy warning that the two forms of documentation, while different in many respects, should be seen as complementary in any historical recreation.

Storm-Clark, Christopher. "The Miners, 1870-1970, A Test Case for Oral History," Victorian Studies, Vol. XV, No. 1, (September 1971) pp.

An excellent discussion of the problem of accuracy in oral history in an actual field work situation and a model monography based upon oral testimony.

ARTICLES (cont'd)

Struever, Nancy, "The Study of Language and the Study of History," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, IV:3 (Winter 1974), pp. 401-415.

An excellent discussion of linguistic theory and development and its relevance to historical study, this article while it does not discuss oral history directly, is basic reading for those interested in the problems of the analysis of language for historical research.

Swain, Donald, "Problems for Practitioners of Oral History," American Archivist, Volume 28, Number 1 (January 1965), pp. 63-69.

Reflections of a traditional historian on the problems of oral history, this essay is a refreshing reminder of the limits of oral history as a research tool and its potential as a source. The essay also contains six general propositions on the value of oral history derived from the author's use of various collections.

Tedlock, Dennis, "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative," Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 84, Number 331 (January-March 1971), pp. 114-133.

Treating an oral narrative as dramatic poetry, Tedlock attempts to transcribe a set of Zuni narratives so as to keep the poetical elements in the written form. While Tedlock's method may be more complex than needed, this article will interest all those who are concerned that oral history transcripts truly reflect the cadences and tones of the spoken word.

BOOKS USING ORAL HISTORY

The following titles have been selected for mention in this bibliography not because they are the best in their fields nor because they represent recurrent trends or tendencies in oral history. They have, rather, been chosen because each book in its own way raises a more general problem in the practice or oral history and if read in light of that problem can serve as a vehicle for a more complex discussion of the various issues posed by oral testimony.

Benison, Saul. Tom Rivers: Reflections on a Life in Medicine and Science, Cambridge, Massachusetts. MIT Press, 1967.

The uniqueness of Benison's work has not been generally recognized by historians. What Benison has done here is to use the interviews he collected from Rivers and from those who knew him, and edited and annotated them with scholarly rigor and discipline. This work is therefore in no way similar to other collections of interviews and represents a model integration of oral testimony and the canons of historical practice. It is for this reason that Benison lists himself as editor rather than author.

Blythe, Ronald. Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village, New York: Pantheon, 1969.

This beautiful little book which is part of a Pantheon series including Studs Terkel's Division Street and Jan Myrdahl's Report from a Chinese Village, is perhaps more poetry than history. It represents however, a classic example of how a sensitive and perceptive interviewer can engender an empathetic response from the people he interviews; in this case the residents of an English village who had never before been asked their view of their own past. The major question raised by the interviews and by Blythe's editing concerns the relation between poetry and history and how often we sacrifice the one for the other.

Coles, Robert. Children of Crisis, 3 vols., Boston: Little Brown, 1967-1973.

Coles is a trained psychologist but his interviews of children in these volumes are really a compilation of the collective history of the poor in the United States. The material gathered by Coles is incredibly haunting and beautifully edited. It is a fine example of the potential of the interview to capture from children a wisdom and an historical insight ofttimes lost by adults.

BOOKS USING ORAL HISTORY (cont'd)

Duberman, Martin. Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community. New York; Doubleday, 1973.

The importance of this book to the oral historian lies in Duberman's conscious attempt to intrude his own subjective views into his history. Based to a large extent on oral history interviews the book is interlaced with Duberman's comments on interviewing, his own feelings during interviews and his views of his respondents as interviewees. It also contains, in places, perceptive comments on the nature of oral testimony and on the empathetic nature of the interview. No other oral history is so self-consciously alert to these problems of the interview situation.

Ewart-Evans, George. Tools of Their Trade: An Oral History of Men at Work c. 1900 New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1970.

This book is one of several by the same author attempting to recreate a way of life which exists only in memory. In the present volume Ewart-Evans recreates through oral testimony many of the by-gone skills of the turn of the century and offers a fascinating example of the power or oral history to rescue the past experiences of plain folk.

Kahn, Kathy. Hillbilly Women. Garden City: N.Y. Doubleday 1973.

One of the few really effective collections of interviews with women, Kahn's set of memoirs has an ideological power and immediacy which cannot be ignored. The book lacks, however, a sense of the pastness of the past and therefore raises in bold form serious questions about the use of interviews for other than historical purposes.

Lynd, Staughton and Alice Lynd. Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working Class Organizers. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

The classic testament to the authors' belief that the interviewing process itself is a form of consciousness raising and therefore an element of history. Some may quarrel with the politics of the book but the interviews which range from complex cultural documents to the vagueness of a popular front ideology more than justify the Lynds' concerns with consciousness and praxis.

BOOKS USING ORAL HISTORY (cont'd)

Montell, William Lynwood. The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History. Nashville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1970.

While more folk history and folklore than what we would usually call history, this study of a now vanished biracial familial community in the hills of Southern Kentucky is in many ways a model for the perceptive blending of both techniques. It is also a highly readable account of the community. Its only drawback is the strange omission of black people in the accompanying photographs which undermines the whole thesis of the book.

Pogue, Forrest E. George C. Marshall, 3 vols., New York: Viking Press, 1963-1973.

This monumental biography of General Marshall is a testament to the abilities of its author to integrate oral history into classical historiographical practices, and as such represents the finest synthesis of old and new. Pogue's achievement is even greater when one realizes that he has his own transcriber and editor as well as researcher and interviewer.

Rosengarten, Theodore. All God's Dangers New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

This is a powerful book which is made so by the personality and eloquence of the interviewee -- Nate Shaw, black patriarch, farmer, and rebel. Aside from forcing us to reconsider many major issues in black history, All God's Dangers, despite the editing by Rosengarten, is a classic example of an interviewer being overwhelmed by his subject and suffused into the personality of the interviewee. Nate Shaw is so majestic a figure that he, not Rosengarten, dominates the dialogue.

Sennett, Richard and Cobb, Jonathan. The Hidden Injuries of Class. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.

This widely praised book raises serious questions about interviewing and editing in oral history. The authors have indiscriminately combined interviews and reworked them, thereby leading one to seriously wonder about the effect of such practices upon the validity of oral testimony. Their undisguised ideological biases and pop psychologizing also color much of this testimony and thus make it even more suspect. Sympathetic in its approach to those interviewed, the book because it ignores so many of the canons of sound historical practice, raises in its baldest fashion the question of the relevance of those practices to interviewing.

BOOKS USING ORAL HISTORY (cont'd)

Tedlock, Dennis. Finding the Center. New York: Dial Press, 1973.

The most complete example of Tedlock's claim that oral testimony is poetry and should be transcribed as such, this volume is so organized and set as to convey to the reader the rhythms and cadences of the original spoken form of the Zuni narratives here collected. While not strictly speaking concerned with oral history, Tedlock is dealing with the vexing problem of transforming spoken syntax into written form -- a problem every oral historian faces.

Terkel, Studs. Hard Times: An Oral History of The Great Depression. Pantheon Books, 1970.

Terkel's major work has become a classic in a few very short years, yet remains misunderstood and misinterpreted. As Terkel himself notes, Hard Times is a memory book not history, and is therefore concerned not with the Depression but with our conception of the Depression and the lasting effects of that conception. It therefore raises serious issues about the practice of oral history and the nature of historical memory. It is a much more complex and theoretically sophisticated work than most historians have been willing to admit. It is also fine reading for beginners.